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ABSTRACT

An overview of curriculum reforms implemented in China during the 1980s is provided in this paper. A brief historical sketch of educational policy from early Chinese civilization to the present is offered. Two phases of curriculum reforms occurred in the 1980s: those for restoration of the social order and those for structural adaptation and reorientation. The reforms of the first phase were based on a meritocracy in reaction to the radical reform measures taken during the Cultural Revolution, which denounced the conventional acquisition of knowledge. Problems included an imbalanced curriculum in favor of intellectual elites, the devaluation of elective courses, curriculum segmentation, discouragement of creative arts and recreation, and overburdened teachers and students. The second phase was marked by decentralization, flexible stages of implementation, inclusion of vocational education, and regulations for less stringent university requirements and for an integrated curriculum. Remaining problems include lack of financial support, an inflexible curriculum for diverse populations, an abstract and segmented curriculum, exclusion of electives and vocational training, lack of diverse instructional media, and no provision for independent learning. A conclusion is that despite the problems, their existence is evidence of a rapidly developing system. (LMI)

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China's School Curriculum Reforms in the 1980s: Achievements and Problems

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China's School Curriculum Reforms in the 1980s: Achievements and Problems

The last decade was considered as the years of reform and change in the People's Republic of China. The outside world has been impressed by the tremendous changes happened in the economy, especially those in the rural areas. The Western World has also been concerned about the political climate in China. Both the economic reform and the student demonstrations have elicited a great deal of coverage in Western media and a profusion of studies on China's economical and political problems have been published in English and other Western languages. As a contrast, very little has been written in English on the educational changes and problems in China. Although curriculum has been an established field of academic study in the English-speaking countries ever since the 1920s[1] and tens of thousands of books, articles and dissertations are being published each year in this field, little space has been made, as far as the English literature is concerned, for curriculum developments in China. As a typical example, The International Encyclopedia of Education does not contain a single entry for China's curriculum among its 50 subtopics in this particular field[2]. In comparison, Japan, with both its area and population approximately as sizable as Hubei and Hunan Provinces of China put together, does have an entry for its curriculum history. Several causes may account for this kind of omission: At first, the language and cultural barriers make it less accessible to the Chinese literature for Western educators than to that in another

Western language besides their own mother tongues, while specialized Western sinologists are mainly concerned with broader cultural, economical and political problems rather than curriculum or education as a whole; At second, having been strongly influenced by Soviet educational terminology, most contemporary Chinese authors usually use a different title rather than curriculum for the same subject. For instance, many elder Chinese authors will use "instructional theory" instead of "curriculum". They define the former more broadly so as to embrace the latter as one of its component parts. Comparatively, English-speaking authors tend to give "curriculum" an encompassing definition while treating instructional theory as one of the areas in educational psychology which may provide some basic principles for curriculum; At third, bound by the language barrier and limited opportunity of international communication, what a few curriculum studies published in the Chinese language have not yet been rendered into English or other major Western languages[3]; At last, China, along with such gigantic countries as India, Brazil and Egypt, is rated as one of the Third World countries which have constantly been ignored by many international communities controlled by representatives from the developed countries. But, with a student population of more than 210 million, China certainly has the world's largest system of education. Without properly taking it and those of other developing countries into account, one can never get a truly global vision of the educational problems of the world. So, I hope that this brief sketch might be able to give our colleagues a glimpse into China's recent curriculum reforms and their general background.

The Historic Precedents

The Traditional Curriculum Formula Literal records of the Chinese civilization can be traced to over 5000 years ago and, a kind of primitive curriculum, along side an embryonic system of

education had been developed in that antediluvian time. During the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.1100-771 BC), the education and its curriculum became very sophisticated already. Children from noble families were sent to school at eight to be trained in a curriculum including a set of ethical codes, moral behaviors and the "six arts", i.e., music, archery, charioteering, writing, arithmetic and rites. Later in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), education was expanded to include children from ordinary families and many learned men started private schools to propagate their own thoughts. Among them, Confucius (551-479 BC) was the greatest. He studied the classics of the Western Zhou Dynasty intensively and compiled six great books[4] which he used as the texts for his 3000 students. The Classics and his remarks recorded by his students in The Analects laid the foundation for the dominating framework of traditional Chinese curriculum in the following centuries, especially from Mid-Western Han Dynasty to the end of Qing Dynasty when the imperial examinations were formally abolished in 1905. Despite a few amendments proposed by Confucian scholars in the Han (206 BC-220 AD), Tang (618-907), Song (960-1297), Ming (1271-1368) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties, the bulk of the traditional curriculum for formal education had remained much the same as recommended by Confucius himself. The major component parts can be summed up as follows:

(1) Literacy, reading and writing characters, learning arithmetic;
(2) Reading and reciting Confucian classics in order to
(3) Inculcate Confucian ethical codes in the student, and to
(4) Cultivate his moral character in terms of loyalty to the throne, filial piety to the parents and ancestors, right order among brothers, trustworthiness among friends as well as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, chastity, fidelity and wisdom; and, at a lesser importance,
(5) Physical and military training in archery, charioteering and martial arts.

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The aims and logical process of the curriculum were succinctly stated by one of Confucius's disciples named Zengzi (505-436 BC) in The Grand Learning (daxue) that the ultimate aim of education was to foster great talents capable to bring the country into good order. But before acquiring this capability, they had to learn to regulate their families; but before this, they had to cultivate their persons; before this, they had to rectify their hearts; before this, they had to be earnest and sincere in learning and thinking; before this, they had to master the essential knowledge; yet before all these, they had to recognize and distinguish things[5]. So the correct sequence of educating the children would start from acquainting them with the nearest things and then extend gradually to knowledge acquisition, motivation, value formulation and personality cultivation. When they had achieved all these, they then could learn to manage their families and , finally, their country in a orderly way. This sequence clearly demonstrates an ethical-political orientation for the whole edifice of the curriculum in which knowledge about the nature did not have a legitimate and those people who concerned themselves with natural sciences and practical techniques were scorned as trivial and not scholarly. Only Confucian ethical codes and political rites were emphasized as orthodox scholarly pursuit. To understand the Chinese mentality in organizing their curriculum for education, it is worthwhile for the reader to bear in mind that the ethical-political orientation is the heart and soul of traditional Chinese curriculum formula. We will see its strong mandatory power once again in modern Chinese official curriculum plans of both the GMD (Guomindang, or the Nationalist Party of China) government before and the CPC (Communist Party of China) government after 1949.

Modern Curriculum Developments The introduction of modern system of education and curriculum, as a part of the social, cultural, economic and political transformation, was a kind of response of the Chinese to the Western challenge, or threat, as many other Chinese authors would like to put it[6]. As early as in

the seventh century during the Tang Dynasty, a few Western religious missionaries, the Nestorians, had already arrived in China propagating Christianity. Although Marco Polo's travels to China in the 13th century were well known to the Western World, Franciscan missionaries had been in China before him and more were to come after him. But those early endeavors of the Western cultural agents were completely devoured by the Chinese culture. During the Ming Dynasty, many more missionaries, the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians and Jesuits, came to China. Matteo Ricci, an Italian Jesuit father, came to China in 1582 bringing with him some books on mathematics, science, astronomy and irrigation which he, assisted by one of his converts named Xu Guangqi or Paul Hsu, put into Chinese. In the early Qing Dynasty, several French Jesuits gained the favor of Emperor Kangxi and even taught him some preliminary mathematics and science[7]. Western knowledge brought by the Jesuits greatly influenced the intellectual life of certain groups of the Chinese elites but failed to bring about any significant change in the traditional curriculum contents.

After the Opium War (1839-42), Western missionaries began to set up schools in several coastal cities. Later they gradually expanded their educational enterprise to most of the inland provinces. Modern Western curricula, including humanities, sciences, art, music, sports and physical education as well as religious faith, were first introduced to the missionary schools, colleges and universities. When the imperial army and navy of the Qing court had been repeatedly defeated by the Western powers and Japan, more and more open-minded intellectuals and officials realized that if China was to become stronger, it had to undergo drastic reforms in its established institutions. In education, they suggested, the examination system should be abolished, a new school system of Western style should be built, Western knowledge, or the New Knowledge, should be introduced into the curriculum and scholars should be sent to the Western countries to study sciences,

industrial and military techniques, political and economic systems, arts and philosophies. But they met stubborn resistance, even brutal suppressions from the conservatives within the imperial court. Only after 1900 when the eight allied forces had suppressed the Boxer Revolt and occupied the capital temporarily did the Qing government come to the conclusion that the very reforms it had ruthlessly crashed had to be carried out if it wanted to avoid an imminent revolution pushed by the Nationalists. So, as a part of its belated reforms, two successive plans for establishing a national system of schools were put forward in 1902 and 1903 respectively and the latter was actually effected. In 1905, the imperial examination system was finally abolished. Schools were set up wherever possible and a new curriculum was introduced to include mathematics, science, arts as well as Confucian classics which remained to make up the central bulk as the following tables[8] illustrate:

Table I, Weekly Time Allocations for Gr. 3, elementary

courses	time per week
ethics	2
classics	12
Chinese	8
arithmetic	3
history(of C.)	2
geography	2
sciences	2
art	2
physical	3

Table II, Weekly Time Allocations for Gr. 2, junior high

courses	time per week
ethics	1
classics	9
Chinese	4
foreign language	8
history	2
geography	3
maths	4
sciences	2
art	1
physical	2

The Xinhai revolution in 1911 overthrew the Qing Dynasty and established the Republic of China. In 1912, the ministry of education, led by Mr. Cai Yuanpei, a returned scholar from Germany, overhauled the school system and the curriculum. According to Mr, Cai's proposition, the school curriculum was to consist of five major components:

(1) Citizenship and military education;
(2) Practical education;
(3) Moral education;
(4) World view education;
(5) Aesthetic education[9].

The reading of Confucian classics was eliminated as a major course but some masterpieces were preserved for the Chinese literature. Science courses were greatly expanded. A dual track system of the European style was introduced and high schools were directed either along the general line which was actually college-bound or along the vocational line which emphasized industrial techniques. In moral education, Mr. Cai recommended traditional values such as

benevolence, righteousness, and tolerance as well as modern Western concepts such as liberty, equality and fraternity.

In 1908, the US government decided to return a part of so-called Boxer Indemnities to China. The money was to be used mainly for the education of Chinese students in America. Since then, many students were sent to the States. When they returned to China, they brought with them American ideas of education as well as knowledge of sciences, industrial technology, economy, culture, political and legal systems. John Dewey's philosophy of education and the progressivist educational practices were particularly influential. Dr. Dewey himself and William H. Kilpatrick, Paul Monroe, Games H. Parkhurst were successively invited to China and lectured in several large cities. Dr. Dewey's ex-students from Teachers College, Columbia University like Hu Shi, Tao Xingzhi and Jiang Menglin became leading intellectuals in education earnestly advocating Deweyan educational ideals. As a result, the school system and its curriculum were once more reformed after the American prototype in 1921. American textbooks were translated and in many schools progressive schemes of teaching such as the Dalton Plan, the Gary Plan, the Winnetka Plan, the Project Method, "Learning by Doing" and Montessori Methods were all experimented on.

A group of European educators, on behalf of the League of Nations Commission, investigated Chinese education in 1931. They criticized the progressive educators of the 1920s for being too permissive with the students and lowering the academic standards. According to their suggestions, the educational reform in 1932 switched back to the European model of dual track system, and the comprehensive high school, broadfield courses, electives, credit system and progressive methods of teaching introduced from America were largely discarded. Now, the guiding ideology for curriculum organization was GMD's Three People's Principles[10] put forward by Dr. Sun Yat-sen. Traditional morals such as loyalty, filial piety,

benevolence, fidelity and righteousness were also strongly recommended, reenforcing the ethical-political orientation.

After the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded on October 1, 1949, the CPC government proclaimed to reconstruct a system of "new democratic education" which was "national, scientific and public"[11]. By "new democracy", it means that the basic political system of the PRC was "people's democratic dictatorship under the leadership of the CPC". So the education must follow the party's politics. It must serve the needs of socialist construction. Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought must be regarded as its guiding philosophy. By "national", it indicates that the education of the New China is the enterprise of the people under the auspice of the government, hence, no foreign agents are allowed to establish, own or run any institutions of education within its jurisdiction. Accordingly, all the missionary schools, colleges, universities and orphanages were taken over in 1950-51. By "public", it was made clear that educational institutions can only be owned and run either by the government or by communities collectively. So private institutions existed before 1949 were soon taken over by the central, provincial, municipal or local governments. An overall reform of the curriculum as well as the educational system as a whole followed in 1952. This time, the slogan was "Learn from the Soviet Union". Soviet educators were invited to "guide" their Chinese colleagues. School curriculum, subject divisions, teaching methods, class management and educational administrative regulations were all copied indiscriminately from Soviet Union. Although Soviet educational thoughts were criticized since 1958, their influences were to continue until 1966 when the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was started by the paramount leader Chairman Mao Zedong of the CPC.

During the Cultural Revolution, schools, colleges and universities were in complete chaos as students were engaged in all

kinds of "revolutionary" activities. According to Mao, teachers were "bourgeois intellectuals" who had been "ruling our schools" for far too long and the situation must be changed. So he encouraged the students to "rebel" against them. And sure they did! For several years, teachers were criticized, bullied and "remolded through manual labor" which actually meant sweeping the streets, cleaning the lavatories, working in the student cafeterias or in the countryside. While traditional Chinese knowledge was labeled as "feudal", foreign learnings were either "bourgeois", "capitalist", "reactionary", or "revisionist" (Soviet). Therefore, they should all be discarded into "rubbish heaps". The only "proletarian" curriculum, according to Mao, should consist of "the three great revolutionary movements", namely, "the class struggle", "the productive struggle" and "scientific experiments". So students were organized to recite Mao's quotations and selected essays to "arm" their minds for the three movements in the meantime of attending "struggle sessions" against various "class enemies" either real or imagined and do all kinds of manual work in nearby factories, people's communes or military units. In the later phase of the Cultural Revolution, a kind of order was eventually brought to schools, 3Rs were emphasized intermittently between endless upheavals as "necessary weapons of the three great revolutionary movements". Randomly picked pieces of scientific knowledge were correlated into a kind of hotch-potch like courses such as "basics of industry", "basics of agriculture", etc.. Physical education was partly merged into military training and partly discarded, e.g., gymnastics. School years were shortened by one fourth from 12 to 9. In those ten years of turmoil, academic standards were disastrously lowered though the number of schools and student enrollments were greatly increased.

Soon after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the Gang of Four, headed by his widow Jiang Qing, were arrested. Thus, the Cultural Revolution deliberately initiated by the ultra-leftists were finally brought to an end. In the next winter, the first college

entrance examinations in nearly 12 years since 1965 were held. Millions of high school graduates, accumulated in those years, took part in the exams. Schools were restored into order as teachers once again allowed to play the conventional role of transmitting cultural heritage and socializing the younger generations. When Deng Xiaoping returned to the decision-making position late in 1977, he put forward an overall plan for economic reform and, as a component part of it, education was emphasized as " the foundation for realizing the four modernizations". School years were restored to the original duration of 12 or 11 and the curriculum of the Pre-Cultural Revolution period was brought back and further reforms were yet to be proposed.

Conflicting Recommendations for Curriculum Reforms in the 1980s

Curriculum reforms in the 1980s can be roughly divided into two phases. The first phase, which actually began in 1978, can be characterized as "eliminating disturbances and restoring order" to the schools. The second phase, which began in 1985, can be described as "structural adaptation and reorientation".

Eliminating Disturbances and Restoring Order During the Cultural revolution, obscurantism was deliberately encouraged as established curriculum contents were totally dismantled and teachers were regarded as "bourgeois intellectuals" who were to be remolded according to "proletarian criteria" before allowed to teach. In the meantime, the outside world did not stop to wait for the Chinese to create an entirely new system of "proletarian culture". Science and technology were developing very rapidly in other parts of the world, knowledge in various social sciences also expanded to an unprecedented magnitude. All of a sudden, Chinese people found themselves still lagging behind the advanced nations in almost all social developments: industry, agriculture,

communications, military, medicine, space exploration, etc.. Deng Xiaoping and other CPC leaders urged the educators to foster more talented young people for the four modernizations of industry, agriculture, science and technology and defence. Francis Bacon's remark, "Knowledge is power", was now the watchword of newspaper editorials. Periodicals were full of stories about intellectuals who had worked extremely hard, forgetting to eat and sleep sometimes, to "recover" the time lost during the Cultural Revolution and had achieved great successes. Political activities and manual labor were greatly reduced in the schools and classroom teaching was once again stressed as the center of school life. Strict tests and examinations were applied at all school levels, even the three-year-olds had to go through tests before entering a kindergarten. Curriculum and teaching were now actually regulated by examinations, especially those for college entrance. Being required for the entrance exams, Chinese, mathematics, a foreign language which was usually English, chemistry, physics, biology, history of both China and the world, geography and politics were competing for priority on the timetable, while music, art, physical training and vocational courses were neglected or non-existent at all because they were not required unless a student wished to enter a specialized institute along these lines. Heavy loads of homework in the subject fields required to be examined were assigned to students and each teacher of one of those subjects was pressuring the student to pay more attention to what she was teaching. Teachers got extra bonuses for excellent scores of their students. Schools had more graduates pass the college entrance examinations were promoted to the status of "key schools" which had the privileges of getting better qualified teachers, better facilities, more financial support and priority of choosing new students according to their grades.

In 1979, Jerome Bruner's Educational Process and Professor Zankov's Teaching and Development were put into Chinese. Coincidentally, both the American psychologist and his Soviet

counterpart advocated that in school curriculum, it was necessary to put more stress on theoretical knowledge and, abstract scientific concepts could be mastered by very young children if proper methods of teaching were applied. Their ideas greatly influenced Chinese curriculum planners in the beginning of the 1980s. The revised textbooks of maths, physics, chemistry, biology, English and Chinese became so difficult that many teachers, especially those in rural schools, complained that they themselves had difficulty in understanding from time to time.

The first phase of curriculum reforms in the 1980s bore strong meritocratic character resulted from excessive counter-reaction to the radical reform measures taken in the period of the Cultural Revolution when conventional knowledge acquisition was denounced. But when the whole curriculum and teaching process was totally dominated by entrance examination requirements, other maladies became obvious. Firstly, the paramount aim of the whole process was now to produce intellectual elites who were able to pass all those examinations at every school level and finally enter higher educational institutions. When only about 15 percent of the senior high graduates or about 5 percent of the total student population could ever realize their "college dreams", the majority suffered from an imbalanced curriculum diet.

Secondly, as all efforts were made to raise student achievements in the entrance examination required subjects, other courses such as music, art, physical training and vocational skills were educationally devalued.

Thirdly, since the courses were taught and examined separately, the curriculum became rigidly segmented. While teachers of different subject fields competed for priority, better equipments and more time allocations, students were torn by their conflicting demands. Integration or correlation among the segmented fields was totally out of the vision of either the

curriculum planner or the practitioner. As the students were divided into so-called science and literary routes early in the senior high period, many college students of science or technical majors from the former route had shockingly inadequate knowledge in humanities and social sciences while those majoring in social sciences and humanities from the latter route did not have preliminary understanding of modern scientific and technologic developments.

Fourthly, because the whole process tilted towards acquisition of basic knowledge and academic skills, rote learning and mechanic exercises reigned over the classroom activities. Creativity and independent thinking were inhibited if not suffocated. Outdoor activities and recreations of the students were reduced to a devastating proportion. Musical performances, sports events and field trips were so few and far between that they became rare treatments for them.

Fifthly, as examinations became ever more competitive, a coalition was formed between the teacher and the parent to pressure the student to study more and play less both at school and at home. Besides regular homework assignments, teachers and parents searched for supplementary materials and extra exercises for the children to do. Overzealous parents accompanied their children day and night supervising, coaching and supplying all necessities. Many of them hired extra coaches to help their children pass major examinations. No household chores were assigned to the schooler to allow more time for their studies. Overburdened workloads became almost unbearable for teachers and parents as well as students.

These defects in the curriculum and mispractices in teaching soon ignited indignant criticisms both in and out side the educational circle. Some authors accused the school of sacrificing the majority (those who were to fail) to benefit the minority (those who were to pass). Others warned that our school system was

producing students with high scores but low abilities. Teachers were criticized for treating the students like Beijing ducks, cramming them with morsels of knowledge without making room for them to assimilate and digest. Ideologic leaders were also concerned about the loosening of the students' political and moral education, manual labor habit and physical fitness[12].

Structural Adaptation and Reorientation In May, 1985, the CPC Central Committee published an important document, The Decision on the Reform of the Educational System, which called on the nation's schools to "Face the modernizations, face world and face the future" requiring that the education must serve the practical needs of "socialist reconstructs". The leadership of the basic section (junior high and under) was decentralized to allow the provincial and local governments to take more responsibility. Townships and villages were encouraged to run their own schools and support them financially. A plan for nine-year universal compulsory education was suggested and, accordingly, a law concerning this matter was promulgated by the National People's Congress in 1986. It was stated that owing to the imbalance in economic and cultural developments across the country, the compulsory education was to be universalized on different stages: the cities and most coastal areas which had a quarter of the total population would reach the goal in 1990; the economically backward areas which had another quarter of the population would reach the goal by the end of this century or even later; the areas in between with about half of the population were to reach the goal in 1995. In order to raise the quality of the labor forces as well as advanced expertise and professionals, the Decision demanded that the secondary section switch to a dual track system[13], reminding us of the precedent models laid down in 1912 and 1932 before the CPC came to power. Ever since the PRC was founded in 1949, dual or multi-track system of education had been accused of discriminating against the working classes by the bourgeoisie. But now, it was

said to be most appropriate in regard to current situation in the country. According to the Decision, half of the senior high students were to be converted to vocational programs in a few years and vocational courses were to be offered in general high schools and at the lower grades, too. For those students who would not climb further up the educational ladder after the nine-year basic education, one or one and half years' vocational training was to be added before they going into the labor market. As a result, many vocational high schools have been founded since 1985, training cooks, waiters/waitresses, taxi drivers, clerks, nurses, repairing mechanics and other technical workers in the cities and towns. In the rural areas, agricultural high schools have been founded offering courses in agriculture, horticulture, sericulture, apiculture, forestry, animal husbandry, soil analysis, fertilizers, crossbreeding, food processing, preservation, transportation and marketing. By the end of 1990, 45 percent of the senior high students had already been rounded up under the broad, sometimes vague, umbrella of vocational/agricultural programs.

In the meantime, pressure came from all directions to mitigate the "children's burdens". Regulations were repeatedly proclaimed by the National Commission of Education to delete inappropriately difficult contents of theoretic knowledge in the texts while relevance of the curricula to real life experiences of the society and the students themselves was urged to be reconsidered. Requirements of the college entrance examinations were to be restricted within the scopes of officially published guidelines of the required courses and the candidate's moral character and physical fitness were to be taken into account in admitting them. Homework assignments and the distribution of supplementary materials were to be tightly controlled by local educational administrations in order to lighten the children's increasingly saggy backpacks. But, in practice, things changed very little. Because college enrollments have only slightly increased over the years and the vocational programs at the senior high section have

only channeled those who are most obviously to fail, the entrance examinations have remained as intensely competitive as ever before among the seemingly eligible candidates. When opportunities of employment for high school graduates become scarce, squeezing through the exams into higher educational institutions or specialized secondary schools, as the students of them are assigned to jobs upon graduation by the state, is, and will remain to be in the coming decade or two, almost the only way to secure a decent economic/social status for the young people. Under the circumstances, all the efforts made by the Commission to mitigate the "children's burdens" are doomed to fail, for principals, teachers, students and their parents are all so tightly wound up and manipulated by the EXAMS that they can not afford to follow those official regulations faithfully.

Once the policies concerning the structural adaptation and reorientation of the education had been made by the CPC Central Committee, the curriculum planners, composed of administrators, educational scholars and experienced school teachers, were convened by the National Commission of Education to work out the guidelines. In October 1986, a new curriculum plan for the first nine years was published[14]. It stated that the aim of this section of basic education was to "enhance the quality of the whole nation" by fostering well-roundedly developed "socialist builders who have ideals, morals, literacy and discipline". It emphasized that political and moral education was to be reenforced while solid foundations laid down for Chinese, mathematics and a foreign language, so far as a teacher is available for the latter. Music, art and physical education were also to be elevated in the same time as natural and social sciences were well taught and learned. Attention was to be paid to the correlation of different subject fields and to the sequential order of successive periods as well. Beneficial extra-class activities, which were considered as an extension of or closely related to formal curriculum contents, were to be expanded while classroom teaching was still emphasized as the

center of the whole school life. Compared to the curriculum plan published in 1982, parts of unreasonably difficult theoretic contents in maths and sciences were cautiously deleted and time allocations for these subjects slightly reduced, while those for social courses, music, art, labor and extra-class activities slightly increased. Although electives, mainly vocational, were allegedly added, very little room was made for them on the published plans as illustrated by the following tables[15] :

I. Weekly Time Allocations for the Six-Year Elementary School

courses	Gr.1	Gr.2	Gr.3	Gr.4	Gr.5	Gr.6
moral & political	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chinese	10	10	9	8	7	7
maths	4	5	5	5	5	5
social studies				2	2	2
sciences	1	1	1	1	2	2
physical Training	2	2	3	3	3	3
music	3	3	2	2	2	2
art	2	2	2	2	2	2
labor			1	1	1	1
extra-class	7	7	8	8	8	8

II.Weekly Time Allocations for the Three-Year Junior High School

coureses	Gr.1	Gr.2	Gr.3
moral & political	2	2	2
Chinese	6	5	6
maths	6	5	5
foreign language	5	4	4
history(of C. & the world)	2	2	2
geography(of C. & the world)	2/3	2	
physics		2	2
chemistry			3
biology	2	3	
physical training	3	3	2
music	1	1	1
art	1	1	1
labor	1	2	2
electives			
extra-class	4	3	3

As the senior high section was splinted into the vocational and general tracks, the conventional centralized curriculum planning met greater difficulties than ever before. So, it was decided that apart from a common core consisted of moral-political, Chinese, maths, the science courses, history, geography, etc., vocational courses were put under the responsibilities of municipal

and provincial commissions of education. They were to be planned and furnished according to practical needs of local economic and cultural developments. Thus, the curriculum plan of a vocational or agricultural high school became a lot more flexible than that of a general high school which still had to comply with a centralized plan.

Curriculum planning for the senior high section of the general track turned out to be very controversial. One opinion maintained that, as nearly half of the senior high students were to be branched away along the vocational line, the general track should be regarded mainly as the feeder of higher educational institutions. Others quickly opposed that vocational programs only channeled those who were most obviously to fail in the entrance exams and only about a quarter of the students in the general division could actually be admitted, the majority still needed vocational training in order to seek jobs in factories, corporations, public services, armed forces or to start small businesses of their own. In practice, schools have very different strategies in dealing with the officially tailored curriculum guidelines. For those "key schools" most of whose graduates are able to "make it" in the entrance exams, they never bother themselves about vocational courses. But many others can only send a small fraction of their graduates into colleges and universities. These less advantaged schools are really caught between the horns of a dilemma: if they emphasize the college preparing orientation, they will probably fail to prepare most of their students for a career when they enter the society after graduation; if they put greater efforts on vocational training, most of the students and their parents will not be co-operative as it is very hard for them to give up their "college dreams" without a try. Some educators suggested that vocational electives be offered along with the required courses throughout the three years, while others suggested that the first two years be devoted to the general requirements, but in the third year, the students be once more divided into

college preparing or vocational classes according to their grades earned. As an official plan has been difficult to be formulated, different strategies are allowed to be experimented on according to specific conditions of individual schools.

The Remaining Problems

Curriculum reforms in the last decade seem to have produced more problems than they solved. Far from coming to a proper conclusion, I would rather end this article by listing several problems which are yet to be tackled in the current decade and, some of them will definitely live on with the educational system deep into the 21st century. Take the shortage of financial support, which can be felt at every school, for instance, one can not be so optimistic as to expect a dramatic change in the nearest future. With an ever increasing population which amounts to 1.14 billion presently[16], China's annual per capita national income has been kept at $300 for years. The total student population amounts to about 210 million, approximately 160 million of them are schoolers. Obviously, what the small piece of the financial cake the education can expect to get has to be distributed among literally countless sharers. As a matter of fact, China's school system has only about $20 to spend on each student per annum. Since nearly 70 per cent of the budget goes into personnel cost (salaries, welfare for staff and faculty, subsidiaries for poor and minority students), little is left for reference materials, teaching facilities, experimental equipments, furniture and other everyday expenses. Many laboratory experiments and teacher demonstrations required by the official syllabuses for the science courses can not be carried out for lack of necessities. Field trips for the social courses have to be cut, too, as schools can not afford the bus-fares. Vocational courses become nominal when students can not practise on proper apparatus. How can they be

trained to drive tractors without a tractor to practise on or learn to be tailors without a sewing machine?

Apparently, financial support determines to a great extent the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching process. However, it is largely out of the control of both the curriculum planner and the teacher. I would like to focus on those problems which, although may well be affected by other factors, are mainly within the scope of curriculum planning and teaching process itself:

Firstly, ever since 1949, the central government established an uniform curriculum for the whole school system. Officially published plans and guidelines for individual courses are mandatory. The requirements, standards, time allocations and knowledge contents are usually rigidly prescribed, leaving little room for adjustments and adaptations to suit particular situations. But China is a vast country with the world's largest population which consists of 56 different nationalities. Large cities, smaller cities, towns and the countryside are on entirely different stages of economic and cultural developments. And the same holds true between the eastern and southern coastal areas, the central plains and the western mountainous regions. As to the different nationalities, they have different languages, cultural heritages as well as different economic conditions. An uniform curriculum can hardly adapt itself to all the different situations. Although the latest curriculum plans have become slightly flexible than previous ones, allowing limited room for local rearrangements, it is not unjustifiable to consider it suitable only for some of the schools, teachers, students and their parents while remain as foreign as ever before to others.

Secondly, the subjects included in the curriculum plans are usually selected, organized, taught and evaluated separately without considering interrelations and interactiveness between one another. The subject matter tilts heavily towards theoretic

knowledge consists of abstract concepts, principles and specialized terminology with little or no relevance to the real life experiences of the children. The student's mind is treated somewhat like an empty vessel to be filled with scraps of segmented knowledge divorced from a real world which is whole, vital and constantly changing. Instead of preparing the student for a practical life, the curriculum and teaching process actually leads him/her away from it and confine him/her into an ivory tower of the dignified academia.

Thirdly, the curriculum is composed of a cluster of required courses leaving little room for electives. What the little time left for extra-lass activities is very often encroached on by the teachers with assignments for the required courses. The students' personal interests have no place on the agenda of the school. Although a few schools do have special programs fostering talents in art, music, Chinese calligraphy, gymnastics and other forms of sports, most schools take the 3Rs as the only legitimate pursuits of the student at school.

Fourthly, generally speaking, the curriculum plans have failed to meet immediate practical needs of the social/economic developments of local communities. As nearly 7 out of 10 students are not moving further up the educational ladder after the nine-year basic education, the schools are obliged to provide them with some vocational training. But the curriculum contents selected and the way they are taught seem to be leading the students in a wrong direction as if preparing all of them for further academic work. Even many of those agricultural and vocational high schools are often found to be nominal, following the same college preparing pattern in actual teaching activities. Apart from the lack of adequate equipments for vocational training, both curriculum planning and teacher preparation are responsible for this result as the former leaves too little space for vocational contents while

the latter arms the would-be teacher with nothing else besides conventional academic knowledge and skills.

Fifthly, the selected curriculum contents depend almost exclusively on printed graphs to be its carrier, only a few privileged elitist "key schools" possess some modernized media of instruction such as film projectors, video players, audio-visual systems and computers. Pictures, photos, charts, specimens and other concrete objects are not amply employed as they should be. The highly abstract nature of printed graphs inevitably makes the teaching often monotonous and unincentive to younger students. It is also argued that the lack of alternative message carriers may hinder the cultivation of the child's imagination and creativity due to the "left-brain biased" philosophy of education.

Lastly, but by no means the least, the textbook compilers are accustomed to process the materials from the teacher's point of view rather than that of the learner's. As a result, the textbooks can not be used for self-teaching purposes. Without the teacher's interpretations and guidance, it is very difficult for the student to learn independently. This kind of defectiveness have caught the attention of many educational authors, though. Some of them have been experimenting on "guided independent learning" and have produced sets of textbooks suitable for this kind of teaching style[17].

As a matter of fact, remaining problems can be inexhaustible, in regard to the vastness of the country and the magnitude of the population. But I do not want to bore my dear readers to any further length. I would like to point out one thing before the final stop mark that only in the course of changing and advancing of an enterprise can problems be generated and be solved. The very existence of so many problems is the sure evidence of a rapidly developing system of education which will be more modernized, more

mature and more consistent in fulfilling its missions by confronting all those problems.

Notes and Sources:

1. Torsten Husen, et al(ed.), International Encyclopedia of Education, Pergamon Press Ltd., England, 1985, p. 1141; Harold E. Mitzel (eds.), Encyclopedia of Educational Research, 5th Ed., Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1982, p. 412.

2. Husen, et al (ed.), same as in note 1, pp. 1135-1275.

3. Noticeably, Professor Wang Cesan of Beijing Normal University published Manuscripts of Instructional Theory (jiaoxuelun gao, People's Education Press, Beijing) in 1985; Professor Wu Jie of Northeast Normal University published Instructional Theory (jiaoxuelun, Jilin Education Press, Changchun) in 1986; and Professor Chen Xia of the Research Institute for Curriculum and Teaching Materials published Curriculum Theory (kechenglun, People's Education Press, Beijing) in 1989, which may well become a milestone in establishing curriculum as an independent field of study in China.

4. i.e., the Book of Odes, the Book of Writings, the Book of Rites, the Book of Music, the Book of Yi, or i-Ch'ing, and the Book of History, or the Book of Spring and Autumn. Since the Book of Music was lost in history, the remaining five books are often referred to as the Five Classics.

5. See for another version of this paragraph in John Cleverly, The Schooling of China, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, pp. 7-8.

6. For more comprehensive treatment of this response, I would like to recommend Jerome Ch'en, China and the West, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1979.

7. For more information see Columba Cary-Elves, China and the Cross, P. J. Kennedy & Sons, New York, 1957.

8. See Chen Xia, Curriculum Theory, People's Education Press, Beijing, 1989, pp. 52-65.

9. Chen Jingpan, History of Modern Chinese Education, People's Education Press, Beijing, 1983, pp. 213-223.

10. i.e., Nationalism, Democracy and the People's Livelihood.

11. An Educational Chronicle of the People's Republic of China, Educational Science Press, Beijing, 1983, pp. 3-4.

12. Articles on these problems can be found in the 1983-85 issues of the monthly journals, Educational Research, People's Education, etc.; the Guangming Daily and the People's Daily also have regular education pages.

13. It is, however, not an exact term to describe the actual structure of the system since there has always been one other track of secondary education consists of specialized schools training elementary school teachers, pre-school teachers, nurses, accountants, police officers, agricultural technicians and other technical workers.

14. see Chinese Education Papers (zhongguo jiaoyubao), Beijing, 25 October, 1986.

15. ibid. Two different plans were published respectively for the five-year elementary, four-year junior high and six-year elementary, three-year junior high schools. Although the 5-4 division is favored by many educators and 5-3 division is also allowed to survive in some districts where it is considered appropriate, the 6-3 division is certainly more popular throughout the country. So I just use the plan for the 6-3 system as an example.

16. The National Bureau of Statistics of PRC, The Statistics Bulletin of 1990, People's Daily (Overseas Edition), 23 February, 1991.

17. Wang Cesan, Didactical Thinking over the Instructional Experiments Undertaken in Our Country in Recent Years, The Journal of Beijing Normal University, No. 6, 1987, Beijing, pp. 1-9.